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PORFIRIO DIAZ

On the first of December, 1904, General Porfirio Diaz took the oath of office as Constitutional President of Mexico for the seventh time, having been popularly elected to that high office for a term of six years. He was then seventy-four years of age, and by virtue of what he had accomplished in Mexico since 1876 when he first reached the Presidency (not by popular election but as the military leader of a successful revolution), he may be regarded as one of the greatest men of the age. And whether his active participation in public life be continued until the close of the term upon which he has entered, or whether he decides to withdraw from the active control of public affairs in Mexico, his high place among the great men of the age is well assured. His greatness is enhanced by having been achieved in a Spanish-American country where conditions are not generally present for the development of such characters as his. It is due to the same cause that it is not fully appreciated by Anglo-Saxons. For so different are the institutions of Spanish-American countries from those to which the Anglo-Saxon is accustomed, that the latter has no little difficulty in understanding the history of the Spanish-American country and makes little effort to overcome the difficulty. He is content to ignore great events which occur in such a country; and the lives of great men who develop there are to him as though they belonged to another world.

It is impossible to appreciate the life and character of Porfirio Diaz without knowing the history of Mexico in the nineteenth century. That century has been especially eventful in Mexico, and of Mexican history throughout the past fifty years Porfirio Diaz has been an important part. He was born in the city of Oaxaca, the capital of the state of the same name, on the fifteenth of September, 1830. The date is a significant one; for it was the eve of the great national fiesta. It was on the sixteenth of September, 1810, that Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla gave the *grito de Dolores*, and led the first movement towards the independence of Mexico. It was an ill-judged and badly managed move-

ment, and was followed by several of the same character before Mexico became in any sense independent. Nevertheless many events in the history of Mexico have occurred on that day, some merely incidentally, and not a few by pre-conceived arrangement with a view to dramatic effects of which the Latin-Americans are so fond.

In the year of Diaz's birth, Mexico had been under its own national flag, freed from Spanish domination, for nine years. Those years had witnessed the failure to establish an empire with Agustin de Iturbide, a creole colonel, as Emperor. They had seen the like failure to establish Republican institutions modeled upon those of the United States. They had seen a Constitution, adopted in 1824, set aside at the close of the first presidential term of four years, and the country become a military oligarchy, one president succeeding another, not by popular will, but by force of arms. They had seen political parties come into existence, without settled political principles but struggling for self-aggrandizement and ready to resort to arms and bloodshed to gain their ends. Two opposing principles of government are dimly seen under these parties, Federalism and Centralism—Republicanism and Absolutism. If the years had seen any one fact definitely established, it was the incapacity of the Mexicans to govern themselves, especially under any system of government borrowed from Anglo-Saxons.

In Diaz's birth-year Anastasio Bustamante was President, the fourth to occupy the presidential chair within eight years, when constitutionally there should have been but two. He had attained to the exalted position by means of a revolution, and he was two years later ousted by the same means. After various efforts to fill the chair, Congress selected for President, General Antonio Lopez de Santa Anna, a man without any moral principle though staunch in his adherence to the Roman Catholic Church in its most corrupt form, and to Centralism. For Vice-President, Valentin Gomez Farias was selected—a Federalist and a man of honor. Between the two began a struggle for supremacy. Much of the conduct of Santa Anna at the time was of the character of opera bouffe. It is too ridiculous to be recorded in serious history. On the other hand, Gomez was a serious-mind-

ed man, a patriot and a reformer. He had adopted a well-digested programme of reform, which was perhaps premature, as subsequent events seemed to show, but which prove him to have been a patriot and a statesman, and to have known the needs of his country. Santa Anna, however, continued his comic opera. One revolution succeeded another, and in 1835 Federalism was completely subverted and Centralism was triumphant. A new Constitution was adopted known as *Las Siete Leyes* (The Seven Laws.) It was but a provisional constitution and the constitution adopted the following year converted the Republic into a military oligarchy, enlarged the functions of the central government and produced conditions which justified the revolt of Texas and made it successful. That revolt, it will be remembered, resulted in the capture and expatriation of Santa Anna. Successive pronunciamientos and revolutions at the capital led to his recall and elevation to the Presidency and to the adoption, in 1843, of the *Bases Organicas Politicas de la Republica Mexicana*, whereby the government was centralized to the utmost degree and the power of Santa Anna was made absolute.

Revolutions followed as in every previous case of the assertion of absolutism. Santa Anna was deposed and impeached. He was recalled, however, in the war with the United States. At the close of that war (by which Mexico was shorn of much of her former territory), under the presidency of Herrera hope was entertained that good government could be established in Mexico. But with the end of his term of office in 1851, disturbances arose, by means of which Santa Anna came into power again and absolutism was again triumphant. In 1853 he decreed himself Perpetual Dictator. The Plan de Ayutla was put forth in opposition to his pretensions and a bitter struggle began for reform and for the establishment of constitutional government.

Meanwhile Porfirio Diaz had grown to manhood and was ready to enter public life, and to become a participant in the stirring events which his country was to witness for the next thirty years. He was the son of an inn-keeper in Oaxaca, who died when Porfirio was but three years of age, leaving a widow to care for eight children upon very slender means. Porfirio's grandmother upon one side was a Mixteca Indian and of his In-

dian blood the President of Mexico is justly proud. His mother was a relative of the Bishop of Oaxaca who was the god-father of young Porfirio and took a deep interest in the lad. In those days the priesthood, where it was accessible, offered the most coveted opportunity for any young man in Mexico. It was the ambition of young Porfirio's mother that her son should be trained for the church, and she was more than encouraged by her relative, the Bishop. At the age of fourteen the lad was placed at the Roman Catholic Seminary where the instruction he received was intended to fit him for the church. Against the maternal plans and those of his Episcopal godfather, young Porfirio revolted. He early imbibed a taste for a military career, and to be a colonel was the height of his youthful ambition. It was by no means a strange taste in a country where war had always been the chief business of life and where the church and the army offered the most attractive careers to the young. At the age of seventeen (1847) he walked (being too poor to go otherwise) two hundred and fifty miles to the city of Mexico, to offer his services to the National Guard in the war with the United States. That war came to an end and the National Guard disbanded before he was enabled to enter upon his military career. So he trudged back to Oaxaca; and having to take care of his widowed mother and assist her in the difficult task of providing for a family of eight children, he sought a career which would secure him a livelihood. He formally renounced the ecclesiastical career planned for him by his mother, and began the study of law, giving instructions to others that he might meet the expenses of his education at the Law School in Oaxaca. He won the interest of Don Marcos Perez, a local jurist and professor in the Law School, and by Perez he was introduced to Benito Juarez, then Governor of the state of Oaxaca. Juarez appointed him librarian of the Law School, thus enabling him to add somewhat to his income.

The meeting of these two men was a significant event in the history of Mexico. The occasion was a distribution of prizes at the Law School and speeches were made of a liberal character, for Oaxaca was far advanced in liberalism beyond the states and cities nearer the capital of the country. Juarez was a Za-

potecan Indian, born in a hamlet in the mountains of Oaxaca and left an orphan at an early age. At the age of twelve the Indian boy knew no other language than the Zapotecan dialect. At that age he accompanied some Indians of his hamlet to the market place in Oaxaca, where he was observed by a Oaxacan, who took him into the service of his household and sent him to school intending him for the priesthood. Like Diaz, he rebelled and entered upon a career at the bar. He became a judge and was now Governor of Oaxaca and was destined to become the chief figure in the history of Mexico for the next twenty years.

Young Diaz readily assimilated the liberal principles he heard expressed on that occasion and resolved to devote his life to the same high purpose that was engaging the services of Juarez and the other liberals. He frequently met Juarez and received from him many marks of attention, among them, the privilege of attending the military school and fitting himself for the military phases of the great struggle then pending for the establishment of constitutional government in Mexico.

When equipped for the practice of his profession Diaz was made a Professor of Law in his *alma mater*, and, on the first of December, 1854, he was suddenly forced to take an active part in the liberal uprising against the despotism of Santa Anna. The Plan de Ayutla had been proclaimed and Santa Anna was seeking to neutralize it by securing a demonstration in his favor. By his manœuvering Oaxaca was filled with Centralists charged with the duty of securing votes for Santa Anna for the Perpetual Dictatorship, and the law faculty was expected to record its votes as a unit. To this arrangement Diaz demurred and he had the temerity to record his vote for General Alvarez, the military leader of the Ayutla revolt, for President of the Republic. It was a hazardous thing to do and required the highest degree of personal courage; and the arrest of Diaz was promptly ordered; but in the excitement caused by his act, he escaped with a friend to Mixteca, where he placed himself at the head of a band of patriots who had risen in arms against the dictatorship of Santa Anna. Within a few days he had his first engagement with a body of national troops sent out against the revolutionists. He thence-

forth dedicated his life and services to the Plan de Ayutla and all that it stood for in the regeneration of Mexico.

The Plan de Ayutla was designed to accomplish far more than the overthrow of Santa Anna and his schemes of absolutism. It differed from the scores of plans, pronunciamientos and revolutions which had preceded it, in its having as its objects permanent reforms affecting the whole country. It was necessary not only to raise up bulwarks against foreign aggressions and further loss of territory, but to reform the internal affairs and establish such institutions as would bring peace and happiness under good government to the citizens of the land. It attracted to its standard leading liberals from every part of the country. Juarez was then living in exile, but he hastened back to Mexico to take the prominent part in the movement to which he was destined. Events progressed rapidly. Santa Anna sought refuge in exile from the gathering storm. A provisional government was organized under the Plan de Ayutla; General Ignacio Comonfort was eventually seated as President, and Benito Juarez was made Minister of Justice and Ecclesiastical Relations. This was in effect notice to the Church and to the Military rule, and to absolutists of every description that Mexico was to be freed from their control and to be governed upon the principle of seeking the highest welfare of the governed.

A Convention was called in 1855 to frame a constitution, and in time the Constitution of 1857 was prepared and ready to be proclaimed — substantially the Constitution of Mexico at the present day. It was to take effect on the sixteenth of September, 1857. In its liberal provisions it was a direct challenge to the ecclesiastical and military rule which had heretofore been dominant in Mexico; and the challenge was promptly accepted. The War of the Reform followed. Comonfort resigned and fled to the United States. His constitutional successor was Benito Juarez, who organized in Queretaro a government which was for a while peripatetic but finally settled in Vera Cruz where it was maintained out of the customs duties of that rich port. Felix Zuloaga deserted the liberals and became the leader of the Reactionaries in the city of Mexico. He and Miramon were in turn Presidents *de facto* at the capital — anti-Presidents

it is now customary to call them — and supported their government by robberies and from the coffers of the church. The theatre of the war was the eastern slope of the Sierra Madre. The decisive battle was fought at Calpulalpan in December, 1860, and resulted in a complete victory for the Constitutionalistas or Juaristas. Juarez returned to his rightful capital to confront enormous tasks in straightening out the tangled skein of Mexican government.

Throughout this struggle Porfirio Diaz was far from inactive. In April, 1856, he renounced the practice of the law and was made commander of a battalion of the Oaxaca Militia. The following December, at his earnest request, Juarez secured for him a commission as Captain of Infantry. Two years later he was promoted to the command of a battalion of the same. In July, 1859, he was promoted to a Lieutenant Colonelcy, and in August, 1860, he was made Colonel in the army of the Juaristas, thus attaining to the height of his youthful ambition. All through the War of the Reform he was in the field actively and successfully assisting in the defence of his native state. He was wounded in the action at Ixcapa (August 1857) and again on the fifth of August, 1860. In his thirteen engagements in the War of the Reform he established his reputation for bravery and military skill.

He also gave proof of his administrative capacity as Civil Administrator of Ixtlan and Military Governor of the District of Tehuantepec; and after the battle of Calpulalpan he was elected to represent the district of Ocotlan in the national congress. But he preferred military service to the life of a legislator, and in June 1861, when the capital was threatened by one of the guerilla bands that had survived the War of the Reform, Diaz begged that he might be excused from his seat in Congress and allowed to take the field; and by his defeat of the guerillas he won his promotion to the rank of General of Brigade.

Juarez in his efforts to bring order out of chaos and to get a chance to straighten out the financial affairs of the government, felt obliged to suspend payment on all foreign debts for a term of two years. This gave an opportunity for the creditor nations to enter into a convention for the ostensible purpose of se-

curing their debts, but really to enable the Emperor of the French to combine with the Mexican clericals, conservatives and reactionaries, for the establishment of an empire in Mexico. The French Army of Intervention, in defiance of all international law, advanced from the city of Vera Cruz toward the capital in 1862. A surprise was in store for the invaders in the repulse at Puebla on the 5th of May, the most celebrated event in Mexican history. The French advance was thereby checked, but the following year after a long siege and a stout resistance the city of Puebla fell into the hands of the Interventionists. In both these battles Diaz won distinction. He was taken prisoner at the fall of Puebla, refused to give his parole to the French under the conditions demanded, but managed to escape from his captors and thus avoided being sent to France with the other Mexican prisoners of war. The advance of the Interventionists necessitated the withdrawal of Juarez and his cabinet from the capital, and they took refuge in the northern part of the country; while the Interventionists took possession of the interior provinces, organized an Empire and finally received the Austrian Archduke Maximilian as Emperor.

The military operations of Diaz throughout the war which followed were most important. On the eighteenth of May, 1863, he was made Full General of Brigade and was appointed to the command of the Army of the East. He was besieged in Oaxaca and surrendered after a heroic defence, and from the ninth of February until the twenty-first of September, 1865, he was a prisoner of war. On the latter date he managed to escape from his prison in Puebla and resumed his operations against the enemies of his country. In April 1867, after a brilliant attack, he entered Puebla and a week later he defeated General Marquez, the chief of the Imperialist army in the South, and prepared the way for bringing the war with the Imperialists to a close.

All this time his patriotism and his fidelity to Republican principles were put to the severest test and were found to stand the test. He received repeated overtures from the Emperor Maximilian and from his Generals, but he refused them all, remaining true to the Republican cause. Marshal Bazaine of the French army offered to sell to him a large amount of ammuni-

tion and to deliver to him certain evacuated cities and the persons of Marquez, Miramon and Maximilian. Diaz declined to be a party to any such dishonorable transactions. He refused the offer of the surrender of the city of Mexico, saying that he was able to take it by the usual course of war.

When, with the withdrawal of the French troops at the demands of the government of the United States, the tide of war began to turn, and Juarez in the North began to collect his scattered forces and move toward the South, Diaz began to move up toward the capital. After regaining Puebla he advanced upon the capital of the country, invested it and received its surrender two days after the execution of Maximilian in Queretaro, thus bringing the War of the French Interventionists to a close and restoring the Republic to the Constitutionalists.

The greatness of Diaz was manifested by his conduct at the surrender of the city of Mexico. He showed great moderation in his treatment of the enemy within the city. His first efforts were directed to the relief of those who were suffering from the effects of the siege. Pillage was strictly forbidden and mercy to the vanquished was a new principle in the history of revolutionary Mexico. Yet of all the Imperialists taken within the Mexican capital — men who had delivered their country over to a foreign foe and had proved treacherous on more than one occasion — men who were directly responsible for the bloodshed in the War of the Reform and in that of the French Intervention, only two were executed; and the conduct of these was so heinous that it was impossible for the commanding general to find any excuse for pardoning them. The decree of amnesty which followed from the victorious government was strenuously supported, if indeed it were not actually proposed, by General Diaz. Diaz showed his real greatness in another respect. He had completed the military task given him. He knew the Mexican people and the glamour which the military hero had for them. He knew that the unmilitary character of the man for whom he had been fighting would suffer by comparison with him. He knew that the effort to secure to Mexico a better government than military rule would be subverted unless he retired from public life. So he closed his official report

of the siege and capitulation of the city of Mexico with the tender of his resignation of his military command.

Retiring to his native state he was received with every honor, and in appreciation of his services in the defence of the country, the city of Oaxaca presented him with the estate of La Noria. He gave his attention to the cultivation of this estate for the next four years, taking no active interest in politics until 1871. The country was then greatly excited over the announcement that Juarez was to stand for his fourth term in the presidency. He had been dilatory in enforcing the reforms promised under the Constitution of 1857 and the Liberals had lost confidence in him. In November, 1871, Diaz promulgated the "Plan de Noria," proposing a reorganization of the government in accordance with the Constitution. Of the uprising which ensued Diaz placed himself at the head as military chief. The sudden death of Juarez, on the 18th of July, 1872, caused the movement to collapse; and all patriotic Mexicans united to pay their tribute of love and admiration for the greatest man Mexico had thus far produced—a man who was absolutely honest and unselfish in his devotion to the regeneration of his country.

Juarez was succeeded in the Presidency, by constitutional provision, by the President of the Supreme Court of Justice, Sebastian Lerdo de Tejada; and Diaz returned to his estate in Oaxaca. Lerdo ordered an election by which he was returned as Constitutional President for a term of four years, and the land had peace for a while. Lerdo pushed forward the work of constitutional reform, much to the gratification of the Liberals, but he never succeeded in winning the popular admiration. He was without the military glamour. Conscious that Diaz was the popular hero, he could not fail to regard him with a certain amount of jealousy. He sought to dispose of him by offering him high positions in the government and missions to foreign courts, all of which Diaz declined. The General was elected to the National Congress in 1873 and his appearance in the capital was attended by such demonstrations of popularity, that Lerdo deemed it safe to have him proscribed as soon as he could have it done; and Diaz sought refuge in the United States, while Lerdo was

preparing to stand for reelection in face of a protest from the Liberals. While Diaz was *en route*, the "Plan de Tuxtepec" was promulgated and a revolutionary movement was begun for the overthrow of the Lerdist government. The revolutionists reached the capital, proclaimed General Porfirio Diaz "Commander in Chief of the Army of Reorganization." He succeeded in finding his way to the northern frontier where he met with some military successes. Then abandoning the field in the north and returning to the south by way of the Gulf of Mexico, running the gauntlet of Lerdists, he took the military leadership of the revolutionists who were named the "Porfiristas." With his arrival in Oaxaca the revolution took on new life. A decisive battle was fought at Tecuac in November, 1876. The Porfiristas were triumphant and Diaz advanced to the capital. Lerdo fled to the United States. Under the terms of the Plan de Tuxtepec an election was to take place "within two months after the capture of the capital of the Republic." On the first of December, 1876, General Porfirio Diaz was duly returned as President of the Republic for four years. He was confirmed as Constitutional President by Congress the following May.

Enormous tasks confronted him in his new position. The outlook was enough to discourage a weaker or more timid man. His government, on account of its revolutionary origin, was not recognized by the United States until 1879. Nor could any onlooker regard Mexico as in any other category than that of the average Spanish-American country. What guarantee was there that the new experiment was to meet with better success than the many that had been previously tried? The effort of the Plan de Ayutla and subsequent efforts had been to emancipate Mexico from a military oligarchy. Two non-military Presidents had occupied the chair of state for several years. Yet "the man on horseback" had apparently returned stronger than ever. The Constitution of 1857 had evidently proved a failure. The feeling of distrust was not removed when Diaz, thoroughly consistent with the Plan de Tuxtepec, in 1880 refused to take a second term. The Administration of General Manuel Gonzales was reactionary, and the public refused to believe that Mexico had entered upon an era of good government. Still the opinion was being strength-

ened that Diaz was the only hope of the country. Part of the time of the Gonzales administration he was Minister of Affairs under Gonzales, and part of the time he was Governor of Oaxaca and magistrate of the Supreme Court of Justice. His popularity was immensely increased by his marriage in the spring of 1883, to Carmen, daughter of Don Manuel Romero Rubio, for all Mexico "loves a lover," and the marriage of General Diaz and la Señorita Romero Rubio was ideal. The visit the newly wedded couple made in the United States, where public men began to know Diaz and to appreciate what he was capable of doing for Mexico, tended to interest Americans in Mexican affairs. While the people of the United States were becoming acquainted with Diaz, he was learning something about American institutions and what was best for Mexico. At this time American and English capital was being invested in Mexico and Americans were anxious to see Diaz again in the Presidential chair. Consequently when he went back to the Presidency in 1884, though it would be folly to assert that it was by popular vote, it was without opposition, it being taken for granted that there was no one else in the country capable of maintaining the government and of carrying out the programme of reform which he had faintly indicated in the years 1876-80. And it was not long after he had taken the chair in 1884 before men everywhere observed that he was far removed from the category of self-aggrandizing rulers and military oligarchs. He made his government a benevolent paternalism. He has been as absolute perhaps as Santa Anna, but he has made his government strong while it has served the welfare of the citizens. He was elected in 1888 for another term and again in 1892. And in 1904 the constitution was amended to provide for the election of a Vice-President and to extend the presidential term to six years.

It would be a difficult matter to indicate within the limits of this paper the character of the reforms accomplished by President Diaz since 1884. And when these reforms are mentioned briefly they seem to the reader far less important than they really are. And especially to the reader who does not know the condition of the country previous to 1876 and at the close of the Gonzales administration. In 1884 Diaz found the treasury liter-

ally empty and the nation apparently hopelessly bankrupt. In 1888 he funded the national debt at four and one-half per cent and made such arrangements for paying the same in gold, that the credit of the nation was restored and the bonds sold above par. He has fostered the development of the resources of Mexico, more particularly of the industrial enterprises, so that Mexico has become self-reliant and has built up vast manufacturing interests. He has maintained the peace of the country and caused the day of the revolution to pass. It was a stroke of statesmanship on his part to convert the brigands of former days into rurales or military constabulary, thus making Mexico the safest country in the whole world to live in or to travel in.

He has fostered education. "The instruction of the people is so essential to democratic life that its progress and perfection, which monarchical governments regard as charity, is with us one of our greatest duties," he wrote in one of his messages to Congress; and he has made the common schools of Mexico second to none in the world. Railway building which began during his first term was greatly developed during his latter terms of office, so that Mexico is better supplied with railways than any other nation of its size. He has successfully grappled with the engineering problems involved in the draining of the Valley of Mexico. He has given his attention to public improvements in the way of harbors and to the public buildings of Mexico. He has greatly improved every branch of government service. He has created a wholesome public opinion interested in public affairs, in place of the stolid indifference of former years as to who might be president or what he might be doing. He has purified the atmosphere of official life, and has taught Mexicans the important lesson of self-government. In a word, he is the maker of modern Mexico; and modern Mexico is a very different thing from the Mexico that existed between 1810 and 1876. It is a nation holding a very respectable place among the great nations of the world.

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